

**you should find your way home (i'll be at your front door) by LucyBrown45**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Anal Sex, California, Domestic, M/M, Tattoo, post-s2

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-04-01

**Updated:** 2018-04-01

**Packaged:** 2022-04-21 15:33:39

**Rating:** Explicit

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 10,407

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Billy's California is not what Steve expects, but it's good. It's what he needs. For once he feels like he's in the right place at the right time.

## **you should find your way home (i'll be at your front door)**

Steve had been worried about Billy going to L.A. He had visions of Billy stepping into a circle of no-gooders before he even met the sun outside the bus station. Still seventeen, but looking twenty-five, Steve had thought Billy might end up charmed instead of charming, doing something rash to prove a point. He feels bad that he forgets how smart Billy is. He keeps it locked down, hidden away. Coupled with those Hollywood teeth and those blue eyes, Steve had no reason to be worried.

He shifts in his seat. The bones of his backside are starting to ache from sitting still for so long. The monotonous road before him is making him squint. He flexes his fingers on the steering wheel, tilts his wrists up and down. He rolls his head back on his neck and sighs at the sound of the bones popping.

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Telling Mr Harrington he was leaving the company had been uncomfortable. "You're just going to move to California?"

"Yeah--"

"What are you going to do out there?"

"Work--"

"No degree. No life experience" His dad tilts his head. "Steve. Steven. You're my son and." He turns in his chair. Looks out the office window down to the yard where a group of men in hi-vis jackets are loading steel girders onto a semi-truck. "I love you. I do. But you're not very. You can't." He stands and walks around the large drawing table and puts his hand on Steve's shoulder. "I'll look after you. I always will." His grip tightens. There's no animosity in his voice.

Steve stays very still. He's not sure what to say. His dad thinks he's a problem that money can solve. Steve half thinks he's right. He watches his dad walk away and out the door, already asking Melanie

if Mr Colehill had called about their rescheduled meeting. Steve folds his hands in his lap and looks out the window. It's summer, but Hawkins is still tinged grey at the edges.

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A radio jockey is having a heart attack over how *The Cardinals* probably aren't ready for the season. His guest is tentatively disagreeing and Steve can't stand the noise. He flicks it off. He's getting real tired of looking at fields of corn. Billy had told him not to drive the *Bimmer* to L.A. Had told him to catch a flight. Said it'd be quicker. He'd pick him up from the airport. Steve ignored him.

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His mom and dad hadn't been home when he packed up the car and left. Steve didn't normally sleep late, even in the summer, but they'd left for work when he woke up. Steve hadn't really said when he was going to go. That morning had just felt right. He'd wanted to leave without any fanfare.

He'd spent the day before once again trying and failing to get to grips with *Dungeons and Dragons* at the Byer's. The Party of kids alternating between laughing at him or yelling. Mike had eventually told him he couldn't play, so he'd gone outside to join Jonathan and Nancy who were reading in the sun. That was kinda boring, so he'd taken his shirt off and set himself down for a nap.

Then there was dinner. Mrs Byers had made strawberry *Quik* with fruit-shaped ice cubes and Jonathan had helped her make macaroni cheese and everyone groaned at Nancy who had brought over packs of *Coke*. "What? I don't get it, what's the problem?" "Pepsi, Nance. You shoulda brought, Pepsi." "Geddit yourself next time then." Mike butted his head into her shoulder and Jonathan kissed the top of her head and Mrs Byers raised her eyebrows in Steve's direction to make him smile.

When he'd dropped Dustin back home, Mrs Henderson had waved at him from the front door and so he'd followed him in. Mrs Henderson's nice. She doesn't ask him any searching questions that make him feel either like a kidnapper or a loser. She always offers

him a sandwich whatever time it is.

She must have figured it out before Steve did, because she let them stay up and watch *The Wizard of Gore*. Dustin must have caught his mom's mood 'cause he hugged Steve tight before he left. Steve ruffled his hair and let him hold on for just a moment longer.

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Now he feels stupid, pulled over to the side of the road, hood popped open, engine smoking.

This is perhaps what his dad meant about life experience. Steve thinks he might be wrong though. Steve knew enough to take a bottle of water and start walking, looking for signs of life in the desert. His arms and ankles, peeking out from his t-shirt and cuffed jeans feel like they might be going a bit red in the sun, but he keeps going.

He feels challenged in a way that feels a bit pathetic, like he should have experienced this earlier. Like somebody should have pushed him just a bit harder. Billy maybe does that. Dustin too. Maybe. Steve shrugs to himself. Tries not to remember the countless college rejection letters. Tries not to remember his brain gone static with boredom working for his dad. Knowing he'd given up trying to be challenged by the work when he was so hung-over one day he'd worn the jeans he's got on now to the office and his dad had merely blinked and moved past Steve into the boardroom.

Buying soda and peanuts at the gas station while the guy tinkers with his poor towed car, Steve thinks about not telling Billy this part of the story. He figures Billy knows Steve has gone against his advice. The way he'd stayed quiet on the phone when Steve had told him he'd think about it, all too telling. He thinks about calling Billy now. It's three in the afternoon and the motel across the way is looking inviting. It's hot out and he's having to dip into the money his dad had side-palmed him anyway for the repairs.

He waits a while longer. Loiters drinking *Pepsi* and kicking up dust. He runs the cool can across his forehead. Thinks about being close to drunk on a fresh-faced Tuesday night in March and Billy had called. Billy had called and said, "I've met a woman." And Steve's heart

sunk. Sticking around iced Hawkins all this time, waiting for Billy to get settled out west and then. In thawing, all change.

They hadn't seen anything of each other the past few months. Billy graduated early in January and immediately took off. Steve still had credits to complete, end of year parties to attend out of an already dulled sense of nostalgia.

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"She owns a gallery. I'm helping her put art up and shit."

He hadn't known what that meant. He'd thought about Billy bopping his head to *Iron Maiden* because he couldn't think of any interest Billy had in art. Maybe the sleeve of *Power, Corruption & Lies* that Steve had caught him glancing at while flicking through Steve's record box.

"Yeah?" Steve feels dumb and awkward. He's been drinking a lot.

Billy hums, low in the back of his throat. "She likes my style." Steve can hear his smirk trickling into his voice. Can hear the self-deprecation and imagines Billy pinching his nostrils together with his thumb and forefinger like he does when he's nervous.

"You got any?"

"I've got style, Steve Harrington." Billy swallows. "You like it too."

Steve frowns. This conversation is circling. "She like it in the same way?"

Billy coughs. "No. No. I was. Look, I got into a fight with this little bit-. No. I was waiting for a friend. A friend." The eff comes off harsh, spit between his top teeth sunk into his bottom lip. "I don't know what to tell you. This ol' lady needed a bit of muscle for her rich-people bullshit and she got me."

"Okay." Steve breathed evenly.

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Steve goes over to the mechanic and asks him how's it going. The guy

nods approvingly. Tells Steve he's got a nice car. Steve blushes. Doesn't say it was waiting for him instead of his parents on the morning of his sixteenth birthday. Steve pats the roof of it before pulling away quickly, the metal is scorching.

Kevin seems like a person Steve can trust, hazel eyes soft behind his small glasses, and he asks if he can leave the car with him and come by the garage tomorrow. Kevin says sure thing. Says they're in the Bermuda Triangle of breakdowns. Nods his head jovially at the empty intersection between the *Ramada*, the encroaching *Amoco*, and Kevin's little pit of car parts and milling blue overalls. Steve offers half a smile and shakes Kevin's hand like his dad taught him to.

He checks in and politely declines, doesn't get all Billy about it, when the young man behind the desk auto-pilot asks if he wants a hand with his case. All of Steve's stuff is in his car. He sighs. He probably should have got something out. His toothbrush.

He wanders the orange hallway. Gets *Cheetos* out of the vending machine for lack of anything better to do. Lays down on the too-tightly made bed and wrangles chips into his mouth without sitting up. The salt chaps at his dry lips. He pushes the bag away from his chest and several puffs fall over the coverlet. He rolls onto his side and presses the toe of his sneaker at his opposite heel forcing it from his foot, repeats the motion and huffs into the pillow.

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Tommy has eaten *Cheetos* for lunch every single day since middleschool. Steve never thought it was in his best interest. Maybe it contributes to how Tommy is. Kinda dumb, but not the same dumb Steve is. Tommy's got a great life. A good girl, acceptance into college. All that stuff.

For his birthday, Tommy got these sweet *Nike Vandals* and Steve was mad jealous. He didn't even know why. He supposed he could have asked his parents to get him some, but it was the principle of the thing. All silver and special looking. Tommy stood out on the basketball court in them. Billy thought Hawkins was a backwater time warp, but even he made some grudging comment about them that might have been complimentary.

That day, Tommy corners Steve by his locker. Asks Steve, looking at the floor, if he'd had a good Thanksgiving. Steve folds his arms. Him and Tommy have been horrible to each other over the years, but they're meant to be best friends. Steve thinks about how sometimes they used that shield to gang up other kids and that doesn't seem right either.

Steve's tired of it. He says, "It was okay."

Tommy claps on the back and grins. "Okay, my man."

Steve sits with Tommy at lunch that day. Because Steve spent a year working on himself and he still ended it chasing monsters and losing the girl. It didn't feel fair. But sitting with Tommy means sitting with Carol and Billy.

Billy doesn't say anything, which is fine because whatever he might have to say Steve's not going to take it any more. He's got scars from stitches that took for fucking ever to heal up. Billy doesn't say anything, but sure doesn't have a problem touching. He runs his hand through Steve's hair, pulling it taut over his temples to take a look.

"Jeez, man." Steve pushes a scout's salute into Billy's wrist to move him away.

Billy's chewing tater tots with his mouth open. He's looking at Steve through lowered eyes. "Sorry about that."

Carol and Tommy are arguing about *Cran-apple* and grape juice. Steve thinks this is why it's so hard to be their friend. Why he has to spend every other weekend with girls like Jenny, Claudette, Bernice. Nancy.

"Man, you're a dick. You know that?"

"Yeah." Billy clears his throat. Rubs his elbow. "I took Max and Lucas to see Night of the Comet."

Steve frowns at his meatloaf. "Like a date?"

Billy laughs. "The fuck do I know?" He steals Steve's jello pot. "You wanna go see Supergirl?"

"I wanna go see Supergirl," Carol pipes up, suddenly interested.

Billy glares at her.

Tommy says, "We can't go see Supergirl, we're going to Indianapolis on Friday."

They start bickering about how much Carol hates Tommy's cousins.

Steve turns to Billy who is pouring jello into his mouth. "Not really. You wanna come to my house and get wasted?"

Billy face lights up.

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Back on the road, he finally feels like he's getting somewhere when he hits New Mexico. He rewards himself by putting on the *Hunting High and Low* tape. Billy hates this. Says it's no good for getting drunk to, or working out to, or fucking to. New wave shit. Steve had laughed at him while he ranted.

Had been a jerk and told Billy about fingering Cassidy Trevors to *Rio* and Billy had punched him in the arm and snorted through his nose. Delighted in the way that boys pretend not to be at gossip.

Once it seemed that Billy had permission to turn up on Steve's doorstep, beer or *Hostess* cookies in hand, he never went away. Steve's mom meets Billy one day by accident. They'd been smoking in the living room getting stoned enough to go back to Steve's bedroom to listen to *Surrealistic Pillow* because why not and she walked in.

Jesus. Billy turning those glazed over blue eyes on his mom. If Steve hadn't been high he would have been mortified. She'd been too rushed to believe the situation demanded her attention. She'd come by to collect a clean shirt for dad. Before she left she told Steve to be careful and to get Billy's parents to call her so they could have dinner together.

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At graduation his mom says, "I thought you'd be wearing a theatre



cord.”

Steve is tempted to just brush it off and nod and move on, but the day is too het-up. He scoffs and frowns incredulous. “Why?”

“Your friends and you. You’re in the drama club.”

He can’t tell if she’s looking at him behind her dark sunglasses. Her wide mouth is placid.

“We don’t- Theat-.” He looks at the ground, it dawns on him what she means. *Dungeons and Dragons*. Jonathan and his weird music. Nancy and her Audrey Hepburn trousers.

His dad wanders up from nowhere claps him on the back and says, “Are you going to introduce us to the basketball team?”

Joyce and Hopper are there for Jonathan and Steve introduces them instead. It’s awkward. Joyce is chatty telling Mr and Mrs Harrington how proud they must be, how proud she is of Jonathan. Hopper figures mom and dad out pretty quick and nods at Steve. “Nancy and Jonathan are by the science building talking to Mr Merryweather.”

Fuck. What a shitshow.

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Steve’s getting real bored of driving now. His back is cramping awful. He bites his lip at the *Welcome to California* sign. He doesn’t feel nervous. He lights a cigarette. Smokes it without taking his hands off the wheel. He feels determined. This too feels weak. Something should have made him feel determined like this earlier in life, surely.

Shortly after Billy had left Hawkins, Hopper had caught Steve drunk one afternoon. Steve had been pretty stupid about it. He’d sped out of school, decided that Dustin and the rest of the kids could catch a lift with Jonathan. He left his car running while he ran into the house, delved straight into the booze stash in the neat, ostentatious, fucking ridiculous wet bar. He’d grabbed the unopened *Zinfandel* and the half drunk *Campari* because he was being dumb and he knew it. He’d got back behind the wheel and veered out towards the quarry.

He was mad angry and he didn't quite know why. He'd quickly discovered that *Campari* does not taste good. He couldn't imagine it getting better with soda or anything. He set his sights on the wine and began drinking in earnest. Billy hadn't called. It wasn't like he'd promised Steve or anything. They weren't friends. Despite Billy lurking in his house, they still fought. Often with slaps, swift knuckles to ribs, grappling ankles and once Billy had bit him. Hard, on the outside edge of his bicep and he hadn't been able to sleep on his side for weeks.

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Billy answers the door with flowers thrust out before Steve can even say hello. Steve reaches forward and takes Billy into a tight hug. His hair is longer. Grown out on top. His other ear is pierced too and he's wearing small gold hoops that peek out from thick blonde curls. Steve holds onto Billy's wrist.

"What's this?"

"What do you think it is?"

"I think you did something stupid."

"No." He tilts his chin into Steve's space. Grins wolf wicked. "Don't be like that." He rubs his palms over Steve's elbows. "Look. It's cool." He turns neatly to show off the ink running down the length of his forearm. He takes Steve's free hand, not clutching the bouquet, unfurls his fingers and presses his index finger over his own arm. *Stay Golden*. "It's you."

Steve shakes his hair out his face, releases his finger from Billy's grip and cups his hands around his neck. "It's you." Presses their foreheads together. "Stupid."

Billy's bought flowers, but he has no vase. So Steve fills a glass mixing bowl with water and snips the heads off and artfully arranges them in the water bath like he's seen his mother do. Billy watches him carefully before taking eggs out of the fridge for omelettes.

This is comfortable. It's nice. Domestic. They're not. Together.

Despite Billy replacing the time Steve used to spend with girls or seeking girls out, they've not kissed or anything. But it feels like they could. They should. Billy left for California and it just seemed right that Steve would eventually wind up there.

They eat quietly. Billy telling Steve about Jan who owns the art gallery he works at. Steve telling Billy about not getting lost and not breaking down. Billy quirks his mouth at this, eyes soft. Knowing. They drink cans of *Pabst* and listen to *Earth, Wind and Fire* that Billy pretends to hate, but the tape is only here 'cause he stole it from Steve. It feels normal. Like being in his parent's house, but better. Something that's just theirs. Something unmoveable.

The next morning is Sunday and Billy heads out to church. He hovers over Steve, still in bed looking at him. Cautious like Steve might run away while he's gone. He kisses Steve on the forehead and steps away, black dress shoes tapping on the floorboards.

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Billy starts work at the gallery late, eleven or noon and comes home late midnight, early morning. They always have breakfast together. Billy slicing avocado, peeling oranges and making milky coffee, jabbing his thumb at movie times in the newspaper for the weekend. It's a long day without him though. Steve spends this time trying to decide what he thinks of L.A. Mostly, it's hot and quietly still in a way he didn't think a city could be. He thinks this might be more to do with the neighbourhood Billy has chosen to live in. Steve hasn't ventured out very far yet.

He'd had to go out to *Von's* to buy aspirin and a young woman with red lipstick had tapped him on the shoulder at the checkout to let him know it was his turn. He'd nearly knocked her to the ground, startled out of his skin.

Steve didn't really think too much about what L.A. would be like before he arrived. Or what he'd do there. Getting here is the point of being here. The apartment Billy rents is near a middle school and not the beach. It's all white walls and faux-parquet flooring with books and aloe plants and a messy kitchen sink. It has a large picture window that Steve thinks Billy might never have closed the curtains

across. His upstairs neighbours are Dita and her children and his downstairs neighbours are Beatrice and her grandchildren.

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Steve has spent the last few days unpacking his shit and generally making his presence known in Billy's apartment. He drove Billy to work one day and on the way home spotted a store selling some truly terrible Hawaiian shirts. He bought three and while Billy had tried to throw them out almost immediately, they made Steve feel more Californian.

He's still on edge about the city, like it hasn't welcomed him yet. He knows he should drive around more, go out and meet some people. But it's nice to just be able to slowly work through his own thoughts. He can take as long as he likes on each step of his day and he doesn't feel rushed or flustered or dumb about it.

Billy says that he should come by the gallery at eight because they've got a new showing and it'll be boring and lame rich people will want to talk to him, but there'll be wine. Steve agrees and summons to courage to drive in the dark up South La Brea Avenue. He borrows Billy's church pants because he hadn't brought anything like that with him.

He meets Billy at the door. Billy who's wearing ridiculously tight stonewashed jeans and that damn maroon shirt unbuttoned revealing his *Our Lady of Sorrows* pendant and too much toned chest. "Hey." He looks Billy up and down. "I thought this was a formal thing."

Billy leers at him. "I'm the bit of rough." He hands Steve a glass of wine. It's really dry.

A woman in a red pashmina waves at them before coming over. She air kisses Steve on both cheeks, he tries to keep up. "Hello. You must be Steve." Her eyes glint at him from behind thick glasses.

He runs a hand through the hair at the front of his face. He shakes her hand. "Yes. I'm Steve." He doesn't know what to say. "I like your." He waves a pointed index finger around the base of his own throat. "Beads."

She laughs and clutches at the large jade stones around her neck. "Darling. You're meant to comment on the art."

She touches Billy's elbow and says, "You'll keep an eye on Fredrick? I don't want him leaving without buying anything." She walks away smartly scanning the room for her next conversation.

Billy puts his hands in his pockets. "That's Jan."

"Right."

Steve suddenly feels very tired and very young. Billy picks up a glass of wine from a passing waiter. "Jesus. That is not nice."

Steve laughs quietly. "What do you think of the art?"

Billy raises his eyes at the huge canvases dotted around the room. "They're damn heavy." He takes a gulp of wine and smirks at Steve's chuckling. Billy looks Steve up and down. "We could go see how fast we can drive down Melrose."

"What about Fredrick?"

Billy shrugs and presses the tip of his middle finger to the centre of Steve's belt buckle. "He'll be alright."

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Steve spends a lot of time on Beatrice's stoop. He supposes with the shared stairwell, it's technically his stoop too, but Beatrice has hung dreamcatchers and a cross on the wall. There's a collection of her lemonade cups next to her chair that takes up most of the space. Her and Dita snap at each other when Dita tries to get past with her folded stroller.

Beatrice's grandchildren are twins. They're seventeen and Steve has only spoken to them a couple of times because they're always studying. He sees them leave the house at five in the morning, book bags looking threateningly heavy. It's weird talking to them or about them. They seem so young, they do everything Beatrice Briggs tells them to. They're so well behaved and so focused. And Steve's just a year and a bit older than them and is haunted by the fact that their

lives are so different.

They seem so happy too. When Steve does spot them, they're out jumping rope with the girls from the apartment block opposite. Or walking to catch the bus, their rollerskates tied and hung about their necks.

The boy, Ishmael especially unnerves Steve because Beatrice tells Steve stories about him being captain of the basketball team like Steve is fifty and looking back fondly on his own highschool memories. He doesn't think Beatrice knows how old him and Billy are and he figures that might be for the best. Steve doesn't know how Billy got this apartment, but he doesn't want to ruin it.

She does the same thing to Billy. Dragging him into conversations about Hyde Park, just as he's leaving for work. Beatrice says she had to get June and Ishmael away from that place and Billy nods and calls out a somewhat genuine, "Blessed day."

Steve has collaged together the fact that Billy spent some of childhood in that neighbourhood, not too far from where they are, and has sussed from the false smile he always flashes at Beatrice that it is not something he wants to discuss further.

Steve has bigger worries than where Billy grew up. He hasn't quite managed to get his head around a resume or doing something about even finding out where he might hand something like that in.

Beatrice is telling Steve about the *Harvard* application process like this might be something he could advise on or needs to know. He's not sure. He thinks she might be talking for the joy of talking, but it's okay 'cause she gave him a lemonade.

Dita comes barrelling down the stairs and collars Steve. Small child on her hip, small child trailing behind her shaking a *He-Man* figurine, slightly less small child staring dolefully at her back and tall child messing about his hair clearly wishing for a couple more minutes in front of the mirror. Steve gets it, kid.

Steve decides to man-up. He can take the Olmeda troop to the park. Keep them entertained while Dita goes the hospital on an urgent

shift. He calls across the courtyard at the twins to see if they want in, but June looks at her watch and holds her hands up, indicating that her and Ishmael only have ten more minutes before the end of their study break. Beatrice coos in her seat.

He does all the right things. He borrows Billy's bunch of plastic gym bottles and fills them with water. He grabs some of the little cartons of raisins. He borrows a set of toddler reins that Beatrice has stashed in her broom closet because Dita had sped off without leaving her keys. In the end it had seemed stupid to strap the littlest one, Tessa into the thing, she was fine walking.

The five of them slowly make their way to the park. The eldest is complaining that he could have just stayed at home. Steve says, "I know, man." Steve doesn't know. He's no idea how old any of these kids are, but they're all definitely shorter than everybody in the Party. Steve says, "You like Star Wars?"

Steve does everything right and it still goes wrong. It starts raining. Steve didn't even know it could rain in California. The kids are all in sandals. He gathers Tessa up into his arms, she's already shivering. As they're walking back he remembers driving to *Pizza Hut* with Dustin one day when it had felt like it had rained non-stop for a week. Dustin had said how his mom likes the rain because they used to stay in and make up stories with the cat.

Steve misses the Hendersons. He gets the kids home. Hands out towels and makes them pancakes. Luci and Sofia badger him for chocolate chips, but he doesn't have any and he's not getting them in the car to go to store to buy that shit.

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Billy's got this thing about food. He's always asking Steve if he's hungry. Steve can only assume that this means that Billy is hungry. Always hungry. The sheer mass of him to maintain. He's always got an apple in his backpack. When he's dashing around downtown, he'll buy cones of street peanuts or when they're walking near the park he'll get them all bananas and sunflower seeds from the corner store.

Steve wanted to get *McDonalds* one night and Billy said no and Steve

thought it was a thing about being ripped and had rolled his eyes. But then Billy told him about what happened in San Diego last year and that was enough to put him off for fucking life. He feels grateful that he hadn't suggested it in front of the Olmeda kids or the Briggs kids. Steve's not stupid enough to ask what kinda fucking monster pulls that kinda shit. But Christ. In a *McDonalds*. Fuck.

Billy insists on eating what he calls, 'actual food'. Because that's what his mother brought him up on. Steve doesn't probe much further, but listens carefully as Billy mutters under his breath about local agriculture and soil toxins and not driving to the farmer's market because of pollution ... Steve loses Billy's train of thought at this point and amuses himself watching a woman shout angrily at a bored looking check-out kid. She wants German rye bread, not Scandinavian and the kid has got no idea.

Billy turns around and jabs Steve in the ribs. Steve rubs his hand over the spot. "Rude."

Billy raises his eyebrows at him, *you were eavesdropping, nosy fuck*. Steve tilts his head to the side and nods begrudgingly, smiles lopsided, *sorry, please tell me more about Californian citrus varieties?*.

He drags Steve around *Ralph's* pointing out free-range eggs and pulling coupons for *Kellogg's* cereal, which doesn't get the full tick, but is allowed because this shit gets expensive. Buffalo tomatoes, green beans that make Steve's teeth shiver, plump corn on the cob, almonds by the pound. Steve picked up on the pattern without too much prompting and is happy to go with it. He's not much of a cook, but he knows how to chuck stuff into a frying pan and shake mixed spice over it and Billy seems happy.

Steve's not quite sure of all the rules though. He came home brandishing a box of six shiny glazed doughnuts once, Saturday night treat and Billy flipped out. Clenched his fist on the kitchen counter, not saying anything. His face gone all blotchy he'd filled his water bottle up at the sink, splashing everywhere and stormed out. Leaving Steve wide-eyed, swallowing loudly around a two big mouthful of sugary dough.

He'd come back an hour and a bit later, sweat dripping from his temples. Skin gone cold in the early evening. Kissed the top of Steve's



head. Kissed his cheek, before setting about grilling bell peppers for dinner. Waiting for the pan to heat up, he'd torn a doughnut in half and shoved it in his mouth around a dirty grin. Pushed the other half at Steve until he was giggling stupid.

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Billy doesn't have a TV, so Steve goes to buy one. The store clerk is a sweet-natured, freckled faced kid whose name badge says Bobby. Steve stares at him too hard and too long and by the time he's outta there the kid is seven shades of red. Steve is apologetic, but there's no going back on the miscommunication.

The kid helps Steve load it into the back of his car, so to try and make it up Steve gives him the last of the cash his dad gave him. On the drive back he curses up a storm and drives quicker trying to escape the embarrassment burning up inside him at what handing over bills like that woulda looked like.

As the days pass he starts to get why Jane likes sitting up close to the screen. Drinking orange juice. Steve has to start wearing his glasses and Billy laughs at him, but pushes the wire frames up the bridge of his nose and kisses him.

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"We gotta get you out of the house."

Steve pauses in picking his keys up from the hallway table. Spread his hands at his hips, looks behind him at the front door and back. "I am leaving the house?"

Billy shakes his head and laughs. Sat at the kitchen counter he hunches over his cereal and angles his head to look at Steve across the floor of the living room. "No. I mean properly, goof. You're only going downstairs."

"We're going to the library. And you're meant to be coming too." Steve points at Billy with his sunglasses.

Billy hums low in his throat. Not in agreement. Not in displeasure. Just the surety that he's decided he is not going to the library and is

probably going to eat a second bowl of *Frosted Flakes*. His eyes are all sleepy and he's got an absentminded palm rubbing at his bare chest.

Steve sighs. Throws his hand up in a resigned, sidelong wave as he goes. "Don't eat everything. Later, dork."

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One day Steve hears shouting from the stairwell. Dita's Spanish fierce, Billy clearly trying to reason with her in the little that he's picked up, but mostly yelling in frustrated English. It's hard to follow, but Steve knows that Billy's seen her eldest sneaking out at night and he'd tried to bring it up during garbage run but had decided to leave it.

Steve imagines Billy has given it another shot and it's escalated into an almighty row. Steve gingerly taps his fingertips silently on the wall as though they might notice him approaching that way. Spider legs creeping corners. He tucks his hands behind his back and leans against the rough concrete, eyes flicking between the two of them in white flag mediation.

They're taking a boxer's minute. Billy puffing smoke out in fast plumes around a cigarette, brows furrowed. Steve knows he's trying to reach understanding though because he's got his hands on his hips. He's not going to retaliate to Dita's index finger thrust in his face. She brushes stray hair away from her face with the flat of her palm and juts her chin at Billy. He seethes. His cheeks are pink as he snatches the cigarette from his mouth and grinds it into the porch with his heel.

Dita folds her arms over her heaving chest. She spits at the ground and Billy takes a sharp step forward and Steve moves into their space. Touches the small of Billy's waist. Steve reaches out with his other arm and wraps it around Dita. Huddles her, begrudging shoulders to his side and bullies a kiss onto her cheek. She huffs a reluctant smile and awkwardly pats at his forearms.

"He wants to raise my children," she whispers to Steve.

Steve glances at Billy, whose eyes are still narrowed. Stood stock-still,

pinning the moment to the corkboard.

“He’s worried,” Steve says.

Dita shrugs and Steve lets go of her. She holds Steve’s hand and kisses the back of it. Billy throws his hands up in the air and makes a half turn on the balls of his feet. Bends over and leans his fists heavily against his knees, looking up at Dita from under his wayward curls. “*Mami.*”

She lunges forward and Billy stands straight to catch her in a tight hug. She’s crying and Steve feels uncomfortable. Dita works the same long hours that Billy does and so Steve can only imagine that this intense friendship was fostered before he arrived, before Billy was allowed to do more than act as a janitor at the gallery.

Billy doesn’t like people. Billy seduces people. Or fights them. He doesn’t care what people think and here he is.

Steve says, “Ale’ doesn’t go anywhere bad. He’s only at Nav’s house.” Dita and Billy stare at him. “Nav’s got one of those Atari things.”

Nav lives in the apartment block next to theirs and is definitely no better off than any of them. Steve highly suspects the console is stolen, but it can literally keep thirteen kids quiet and occupied at any one time. Steve has witnessed its power and he’s not arguing with it.

Dita looks like she’s regretting allow Steve to babysit her kids. What idiot thinks it’s okay for an eleven year old to sneak out and play video games until long gone bedtime. Steve shrugs. I’m here, I’m awake, I check he comes back. He has school in the morning. School, Steve. He’s smart. He’s okay.

Over breakfast Billy says, “Why didn’t you tell me that Alejandro was fine?”

“I didn’t know it was a thing.”

Billy lights a cigarette. Deliberately flexes the muscles in his arms as he does. Busted. “It’s not.”

They're sat watching *The Golden Girls* one evening. Billy on the floor between Steve's knees. Steve absent-mindedly twirling Billy's hair around his fingers. Billy's trying to figure out a seating plan for some gallery dinner, post-it notes strewn about the living room and Steve is being zero help.

Steve finally starts to get it. A bit. The art thing. To Dita and Beatrice, Steve and Billy look like two brothers trying to find their way, just more ants on the anthill. To the rest of the world they look something contagious. Something shameful.

To Jan they are babes in the wood in need of protection. Steve finally twigs his mother's theatre euphemism and supposes art can do that. Cover up and gloss over in oil paint, pretentious lyrics, neon lights up something ugly. Make it good or justified. Billy is smarter than Steve can ever really give him credit for.

Nancy said he could do anything and maybe this wasn't what she meant. He doesn't know what she meant. He certainly isn't smart like her and Billy. Or creative like Jonathan or like Billy is apparently turning out to be. It's just. As well as not really being anything, he doesn't really like anything. Basketball was okay, but it's not like he misses it. Billy reads a lot, but Steve watches so much TV he can feel it playing on his eyelids when he goes to sleep. That's true for everyone, right.

He likes hanging out with Dita's kids, but that's not a thing. She gives him gas money sometimes that he doesn't use 'cause it's normally so sunny he figures they should all walk. He checks the weather just in case nowadays. Then he ends up buying the kids icy-pops and chips so. It's not a wage. Even if hanging out with them felt more like a job than being with the Party.

Steve looks down at Billy, tips his head back by his hair. Smooths his thumbs over Billy's eyebrows making his forehead crinkle. "Wha'" he says not quite able to get sound through his throat at this angle.

"Nothing. Just checking on your pretty."

Billy twists, getting an elbow up on Steve's knee. "Yeah? It still there?" He runs his tongue over his top teeth.

"Sure thing." Steve pretends not to be interested.

Billy arches an eyebrow at him. The effect is a little lost 'cause Steve's touching has mussed their dramatic shape. Billy goes back to his labels, but presses a kiss to Steve's thigh peeking out from his shorts.

--

They first go to the beach one Saturday. It takes Steve forever to get ready. He's dithering, keeps getting distracted by the television. Just wants to rearrange the contents of the fridge. Just wants to call Dustin, it won't take a minute. Then it gets so close to lunchtime that Billy sighs and wants to eat before they go 'cause he'll get grouchy on the way if they don't.

They get there late in the afternoon. They walk all the way up from Venice to Santa Monica. Quietly swinging their arms close. It takes forever, but the sea air feels sharp and full of life. He feels hot with something he can't name. Billy's golden curls tangling in the breeze, his skin tasting of salt when he kisses him.

Feels hopeful in the world. Even staring at the wrecked Santa Monica pier, destroyed by the strength of the ocean. They watch the sunset, running their fingers through grains of cool evening sand.

After a long day, Billy is ready for bed. His bones ache like he's spent the day surfing. Steve, a heavy blanket on top of him. Billy knows that Steve has been on vacation to Caribbean islands, has visited European beaches and so doesn't ask what he thinks of the biker bars and shitty souvenir shacks on their walk. But Steve smiled so brightly all afternoon with an ease Billy's never seen before. And that's enough.

Sometime in the middle of the night, Steve finds himself eyes wide open. Unable to regulate his breathing. He gets up, pressing his hands onto Billy's abdomen as leverage, not really thinking. Makes tea without straining it. Strong black tea Billy buys from a Chinese grocery on his way home from work.

He sets it down on the coffee table. Sinks into the couch. Leans his head back. Eyes at half-mast but unable to close. He doesn't know how much time has passed, when he feels Billy crawl into his lap. He's unabashed in just his underwear, skin still hot from being wrapped up in bed. He nuzzles his face into Steve's neck. "Hey." Steve feels the movement of Billy's lips more than he hears him. "You okay?"

Steve nods and winds his arms around Billy's waist. Kisses him. "Yeah. I'm good." He realises Billy is rocking down, just a little, on Steve's growing erection. It takes him by surprise. "Yeah. This is good."

"You wanna keep going?"

"Uh-huh," Steve mouths at Billy's bottom lip.

Billy brings his hands around Steve's neck, lick his tongue at the roof of Steve's mouth before pulling away. He steps back and pulls his briefs down and Steve closes his mouth with a click, caught on that he was gaping. Even in the dark, Billy's all thick muscle and soft curves. Steve reaches out for him, holds onto his hips and sucks at his tummy, under his belly button.

Billy moans and pulls Steve back by his hair. Gets Steve to wriggle out his sweatpants. Helps him pull his t-shirt over his head. They pause, breathing heavily. Steve running his palms over Billy's thighs, the hair coarse, but the skin smooth. Billy holding Steve's sides, thumbs stroking. Steve kisses him and feels safe. Secure. At home.

They giggle when Billy tells him to move so he can retrieve the lube he'd stashed down the side of the couch and Steve scrapes his teeth along his jaw laughing. But knows how it feels to not have to keep your whole identity in your bedroom. To be able to exist in a bigger space. "Good thing no one can look through that window." Billy bites at his shoulder.

When Billy goes to squeeze glistening *K-Y* over his fingers, Steve stops him and takes over. He starts slow, just the tip of his index finger rubbing at Billy's hole making him shift forward pressing his hard cock against Steve's. Billy tilts his head back when Steve starts

fingering him properly. Fingertips pressed tightly against Steve's chest.

Steve mouths at his chin. Kisses his cheek so that Billy's arched back goes straight and he slides his tongue along Steve's. Billy shuffles on his knees and pulls at Steve's wrist. Sinks down carefully over Steve's dick. Lets Steve clutch at his ass. Pleasure tickling at the base of his spine when Steve's hand ghosts there, angling him slightly finding that spot inside him.

Christ. Those blue eyes watching him like he knows that this is better than anything Steve has ever felt. That mouth, not sneering or pouting but open, whimpering for Steve. Billy's pendant sways into Steve's chest as Billy speeds up. He leans forward following it, sucks at Steve's earlobe. "Good. This is good."

Steve finds Billy's mouth. "It's good. You're good. You're so good." He gets his hand around Billy's dick, strokes him fast, thumbs at the slit. He can't quite last, not with Billy bouncing on top of him and comes just a couple of twists of his wrist before Billy.

Cooling off, feeling a bit dazed, fingers stroking over the nape of Steve's neck, clenching and unclenching. Billy whispers, still panting a little, "You fuck many boys?"

Steve rubs the length of his nose over Billy's chest. Sucks in a breath through his mouth. Billy can feel his eyelashes tickling the skin, feels his lips. Pecks a kiss in the same spot. "Just you."

Billy murmurs reverently, "King Steve." Steve bites his collarbone 'cause he catches the undercurrent sarcasm and Billy chuckles softly and tugs at Steve's hair. Slurs sleepily, "'S good." Kisses Steve sloppily on the cheek. "Now I know." Licks his lips before kissing Steve on the mouth slowly.

--

Billy goes to doctor complaining of backache that radiates across his trapezius and up to the base of his skull. She spends too long with her fingertips on his neck, sizing up his lymph nodes, looking up at the ceiling in thought. As she continues checking him over, those curious

fingertips linger on the birthmark on the curve of his bicep. She smooths her thumb over it. "Has this always been raised?"

She spreads her index and middle finger and presses them in a peace sign either side of the dark skin. "Have you notice it change recently?"

"No." Billy turns his head slightly, doesn't like that she's behind him and he can't see the look on her face. "I've always had it."

She taps the examination table he's sat and comes to stand in front of his knees. He catches her lips rolled in assessment. "Take your shirt off."

He's fast regretting this. He'd only come because Steve had booked the appointment. It had felt stupid to still be afraid of going to the doctor's. He has a real job and an apartment and a. There's Steve. He's just injured himself lifting or something and he's an adult so his. So Steve had called the doctor's office because he was at home during opening hours. And here he is. Just wanting something stronger than *Motrin*.

Billy pulls his white tee off, resisting the urge to sigh. It hurts his shoulders and he tries to sit up straighter to compensate for it. Doctor Miller is frowning at his chest. He self-consciously puts his hand over his pendant. She firmly, but delicately picks his wrist up to move it out the way. He's her specimen now. He wants to glare at her, maybe say something snippy about being manhandled, but he feels unmoored. He can hear her brain tracking through the hills of medical knowledge.

She steps back. "How have you been feeling lately?"

He told her once already. "Fine."

"No temperature? Sore throat? Tummy pain?"

He shakes his head at each symptom.

She pulls her wheeled chair out from her desk towards them and takes a seat. She brings her palms down on her thighs as though exhausted. "When was the last time you practiced unsafe sex?"



The question makes him snort loudly through his nose, he has to bring the back of his hand up to his nostrils. Recovering, he sees she's still and waiting for him to answer. Sat back in her chair, eyes narrowed in expectation. He has the decency to blush, but leans to the side, ignoring the pain in his back. "Like. This morning." He crooks his mouth at her and tilts his chin into his shoulder.

"A casual partner?"

Jesus Christ. "No." Billy's bored now and embarrassed and tired and he wants to go home. "No. We live together. We're together." He sits up straight and puts his shirt on.

"He's your only partner?"

He looks at her. Eyes flickering over hers. They're a sure hazel green that hold his panicked gaze. Dissected frog, Billy thinks. He brings his hands into his lap. "Yes."

She nods, just once and uses the heels of her rubber shoes to drag her and her chair back to her desk. She writes him a prescription. "This is for your back." She takes out a flyer from the drawer. "This is a sexual health clinic. I want you and your partner to get tested."

"For what?"

"Sexually transmitted diseases."

Billy holds his breath. He shoves both wrap sheets into his back pocket, but looks her dead in the eyes before saying. "Okay."

At the gallery, he's trying to focus on the accounts. Jan's out front talking to some suit from New York. He's a douche who keeps looking past her, through the open door to where Billy's trying to hide. Pencil tapping. Jan's noticed the buyer's drifting attention and calls out to Billy to get him to come make small talk. Play nice.

They're stood close to the front window so he stands and reaches for the door handle. Raises his arms and shakes his head like he's doing them a favour, giving them privacy and slams the backroom door. He'll get shit from Jan later because the gallery's not actually big enough for him to not have been able to hear her request. But he

doesn't care. He's busy.

He sits on top of the teak sideboard, crushing a stack of open art catalogues and several copies of *The Advocate*. He pulls them out from under him and tosses them to the floor. He puts his pendant in his mouth. Swinging his legs back and forth he pretends the flyer isn't searing bad vibes through his jeans.

He leans over groaning at the strain, and awkwardly opens the cabinet below and fumbles grabbing the pharmacy bag. He takes his pills out and letting his necklace slip from his mouth, spit damp, he swallows one dry. She'd said to wait and have it with dinner, but the pain is nagging and he's trying to think. Steve has slept with a bunch of people. Girls who are not Billy. The pretty bastard lost his virginity when he was twelve. Billy's still not sure what that means about Steve. Or the jerkoff kids in Hawkins. Or fucking society or something. Christ, if Billy had gone and got his dick sucked at twelve, his dad would have made sure he wasn't alive today.

Whatever. 'S'not like it matters to Billy who Steve's banged. It's just that. Outta the two of them, if anyone's gonna be spreading their dirty fucking germs about, it's Steve and fucking Doctor Miller wants to get it confirmed.

Billy tips his head back. Worse. They're gonna have to. 'Cause fairy Pete died. Then that guy that Pete drinks margaritas with. It's on the news too, but Billy tries to avoid that. Even on Steve's television that he leaves beaming sixteen hours a day reaming the electric bill like he's still at his parent's mansion.

Pressing back against the wall, it feels good and cool on his spine. Steve doesn't actually leave the house, so Billy figures he's probably not cheating on him.

"So what's your problem?" Jan bustles into the room, red boots clomping over the mess Billy has made. She bends at the waist to peer at him over her large, thick-rimmed glasses.

Billy groans. "Nothing."

She begins picking up magazines and Billy feels bad, but his back

hurts so he decides he's going to stay where he is, moping like an ass. "Can I go home?"

"No. What did the doctor say?" She arranges the stack next to his hip and puts his pill bottle on top, coyly inspecting it. "This is Percocet."

"Yeah. It's not fucking working."

Jan puts her hands on her hips. "Well. He bought the Saar, even without your help." Billy thinks most of the *Saar* collection is ugly so he's not sure what good he would have done. "Will you call Mike for me? I'd rather get everything wrapped and shipped today and obviously, you can't."

"I can. Just give me a minute." He locks his fingers together behind his neck and squeezes his eyes shut before opening them big and blue and pouting at her. "Will you buy me an Orange Julius?"

"No." She pushes curls off his forehead. "Look. Call Mike, you finish the books and then I'll let you go at four so you can get all pretty for the wine reception tonight."

Billy hangs his head. Looks up at her imploringly. "How about I don't call Mike. I finish the books, get the painting sent out and—" He holds up a finger. "I'll do the layout for that ad agency." Brings it down triumphantly.

She folds her arms. "You don't wanna come to the wine reception."

His smile is sardonic as he shakes his head. "I really don't."

She looks him over. "Okay. I'm going to Naugles."

Billy grins at her retreating back. Licks his teeth knowing she's going to bring back an *agua fresca* the size of his head and it's going to be sweet and fruity and is going to make him feel fourteen times better. Although that might just be the drugs.

When Billy gets home that evening, he's feeling a bit worse for wear, but seeing Steve in the kitchen, oven mits on leaning against the sink quietly mouthing the words to the *Toys 'R' Us* commercial playing on the TV. He melts at that.

Steve spies him hovering in the hallway. "Hey." Jesus those eyes. Billy feels like walking back out and coming in again just to see them turn from dead wood to soft treacle one more time.

"Hey." He steps forward and puts his hands on Steve's elbows. Kisses him hello. Parts his mouth to kiss him glad you're here. Tips his head down kisses him don't stop.

The egg timer on the counter goes off and Steve pulls away. He nods to the timer. "But don't look."

Billy frowns, but twists the timer off as Steve opens the oven. He puts it on the windowsill and turns his back. Steve told him not to look, but he doesn't know if that means he should leave. He feels a bit stupid staring out into the hall from the kitchen, like he's forgotten where he's supposed to be going.

From behind him he hears Steve laugh. "No-Go on. Go take a shower. I don't want you to see what I made."

Billy throws his hands up in the air, laughing too and putters off to the bathroom.

Steve is chopping broccoli when he comes back in sweats and no shirt. He wraps his arms around Steve's waist, pressing close and steals a chunk from the cutting board. Steve shrugs his shoulders at him, but let him stay where he is. Billy bites at his earlobe. "Why can't we eat what's under there?"

Whatever Steve took out of the oven sits in their big casserole dish and has been hidden with a kitchen towel. Steve doesn't answer, so Billy licks up his neck. "It's not dinner. I didn't think you'd be back so I didn't make dinner."

Billy kisses his cheek and butts his forehead against Steve's temple, getting him to duck so he can open the cupboard above him. He takes out a bottle of ketchup. "Steve, put the knife down." He pushes at Steve's knees so that he can take out a sandwich box and two plates.

He hands the plates to Steve and nods at the table. He puts the hacked broccoli into the box and into the fridge. Without removing

the towel, he tucks it over the still hot handles and sets Steve's secret down between them. He's fairly certain he knows what it is. He leans back in his chair, wincing as his back lances pain through his neck, and pinches the ladle from the old coffee can.

Steve doesn't look thrilled at the reveal. "I told you. It's not for you."

"You were gonna eat this whole pan of mac 'n' cheese?" Billy's grinning at him.

"Yeah." Steve watches as Billy scoops out generous servings. Shrugs. "Was gonna watch the midnight movie."

Billy douses his in ketchup. "We gotta get you away from that box. You're like that kid, Mike TV." Billy shovels pasta into his mouth. "You know. In the book. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory."

Steve frowns down at his plate. He's not so invested in it now. He kinda wants to eat the broccoli. "Sorta."

Billy nudges him with his elbow. Gets him to look at him. Speaks low in the way that Steve knows he's not messing around. "This is real good. Thank you."

Steve takes a bite. "What did the doctor say?"

"Oh. Just. She gave me some pills." He wriggles in his seat. "She asked if I do any heavy lifting." He raises a cheeky eyebrow at Steve who smirks back.

During the commercials between the news and the start of *Freaks* Billy tells Steve about getting tested. He strokes a hand down Billy's warm, full tummy and quietly says okay.

--

Steve is wandering the library looking for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, but he's not sure who wrote it. Steve watches a lot of kids' programming these days and feels betrayed that it hasn't taught him this.

The Olmeda kids are around somewhere. He could ask one of them,

but he's not sure how that would pan out. They're younger than the Party. If he could ask them he knows that Mike would laugh at him and then Lucas would politely point out that Jane doesn't know either and Mike would go quiet. So Will would actually tell him and then Dustin would tell him what he should be reading instead. He'd been keeping Steve updated on the plot of the *Earthsea* series.

The librarian is watching him. He'll go ask her in a minute, but he's just gonna do one more lap of the children's section. He doesn't think he's infected with anything. Sex ed' in Hawkins was shit. His parents certainly never talked to him about the birds and the bees. He thinks maybe Billy thinks that twelve was probably a bit young to have stuck his tongue in Jessica Hemmings's cunt.

What does Steve care. Jessica was super nice. And it had felt right to prove how nice he thought she was. He'd never. It wasn't like he'd got his hands on a stash of filthy porn and had wanted to try it out on the first willing body. It was just. Kissing was nice. Wet and sweet. Making him feel excited and comfortable.

And Jessica had been so warm. She always wore a little pink blouse with the day of the week embroidered on the pocket and the thread was rough against his fingertips as he cupped her soft breast. She hugged him so close he felt like he had to rely on her to breathe. She made these little gasping chuckles and he felt flushed and it was fun, like they were still playing with her *Spirograph*, but more.

She'd touched him first. Braver than him. But he knew what she was doing because he had a lot of sleepovers at her house and they sneaked the same late night TV shows. Steve doesn't care what anybody says, it was super innocent. They were dumb and lonely and it was nice to have somebody that close. Who knows about Billy. He's tight-lipped on his life before Hawkins.

He's almost sure that Billy has slept with boys who aren't him. But he's finding it hard to care. He's not jealous about sex. It feels good. He gets jealous when he knows he's being made a fool of. He tries to remember that he's not bitter about Jonathan and Nancy. But that had been cruel. Fucking Jonathan and his. His whatever. That was better than Steve's.

Steve flicks through a copy of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. He thinks about checking it out for Billy. He's over Nancy. Obviously. Just sometimes. When Billy says. Shit like, "I met someone." And doesn't immediately follow up with the story that outlines how the someone isn't the same type of someone Steve is. That gets him riled. And Billy says that shit a lot, 'cause he's out at the fucking art gallery all fucking day. Meeting buyers and booking drawing class and hosting cocktail events. Bullshit.

He makes his way over the desk to ask about *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The librarian points out a display shelf for the summer vacation. *Roald Dahl*. Steve bites his lip. He coulda found that if it had been with the rest of the fiction in alphabetical order.

He catches up with the kids gathered around a *Where's Waldo* book. Rosa spots his choices. "At the end, Charlie eats the factory."

Thanks, kid.

--

They're both clean. Thank fuck. They stand in the hallway, Steve's arms wrapped around Billy's shoulders, his hands holding the opened letters trapped between them. Listening to the eggs boiling on the stove. Billy presses his lips onto Steve's neck, rubs his nose there and doesn't realise his face is wet until Steve gently sways them. "We're good. We're here."

Steve sweeps his thumb over Billy's tear spiked eyelashes and uses the edge of his t-shirt to wipe at his pinked cheeks. Billy swats at him, groaning. He takes Steve's jaw in his hands and kisses him. Whispers into his mouth, "Fuck me." Pushes Steve against the wall and Steve's fingers clutch at Billy's soft hips. Nods as he slips his tongue into Billy's mouth.

After, sat on the floor, Billy's hand on Steve's bare thigh watching his eyes as Steve stares unashamedly, gratefully over Billy's naked body. Billy reaches up to the hallway table and drags the beat-up paperback that Steve left there. He rests his head against Steve's chest, warmth radiating through the soft cotton of his t-shirt.

*He hadn't even unwrapped the Golden Ticket from around the chocolate. He was standing very still, holding it tightly with both hands while the crowd pushed and shouted all around him. He felt quite dizzy.*

**Author's Note:**

I'm on [tumblr](#). (: